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SUBJECT: SOMALIA: POLITICAL SOLUTIONS REQUIRED FOR SHIPPING  
INDUSTRY PIRACY CONCERNS

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Maura Connelly, reasons 1.4  
(b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Discussing French efforts to establish secure maritime supply chains for humanitarian aid for Somalia at a June 12 think-tank event in London, French MFA and Defense Ministry representatives were met with strong demands from shipping industry leaders for the international community to improve the security situation more generally in the waters around Somalia. While French naval support did result in safe food aid delivery, it did nothing to protect commercial vessels from ransom piracy. Although no solutions were offered, it was agreed that a solution would have to come "on land, not at sea," in the form of a stronger central government in Somalia. The French, however, remain hesitant on deployment of a UN peacekeeping force in Somalia because they believe not enough progress has been made in the political process and force generation would be difficult. End summary.

¶2. (C) At a June 12 Chatham House event, French MFA Horn of Africa Political Officer Thierry Caboche and French Ministry of Defense representative Captain De Bremond d'Ars outlined France's experiences in providing anti-piracy protection to vessels carrying humanitarian aid to Somalia. Caboche began by explaining that continued piracy in Somalia and international waters around Somalia had decreased normal commerce, exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation. In November 2007, France started providing French navy ships to escort World Food Program (WFP)-contracted vessels delivering food aid to Somalia. Despite the numerous legal obstacles, France considered the mission a huge success, noting that WFP food stocks in Somalia increased from an eight-day to a three-month supply. The escort missions continued in 2008 first with Danish and then Dutch support. The Dutch will continue escorting WFP vessels through the end of June, when the support will stop because no country has offered to continue the mission.

TFG: A Real Interlocutor

¶3. (C) Caboche said France had found a "real interlocutor" in the Somali Transition Federal Government (TFG). The TFG demonstrated it wanted to work with the international community to combat piracy by working through the legal obstacles and garnering support in the UN. Caboche said that while many of the regional authorities in Somalia, like Puntland, were important local institutions, the TFG should remain the main interlocutor for the international community. Caboche also noted the strong support the U.S. gave in the

UN to countering piracy.

On Ransom and General Security

14. (SBU) International Maritime Organization (IMO) representatives argued that the international community and shipping industries need to make stronger regulations against paying ransom to pirates, which fuels the piracy industry in the waters around Somalia. Several shipping industry representatives argued that the current assistance to WFP vessels was good for the humanitarian situation but did nothing to improve the general security in the waters. They said shipping insurance continues to become more expensive for vessels transiting these critical trade routes, and short-term solutions on water routes does not alleviate the general political insecurity in Somalia that creates an enabling environment for pirates. Shipping industry leaders conceded that paying ransom perpetuates the problem. They, however, said that since the pirates had not killed crews or plundered cargo, it would be difficult to justify not paying when they know they can secure the safe release of the crew (and cargo).

Comment

15. (C) The French were clearly taken aback at the shipping industry representatives' demands for the international community to improve security in the key maritime trade routes around Somalia. While no solutions were offered, both sides agreed that piracy must be "dealt with on land, not at sea" in the form of a more stable political environment in

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Somalia. In a side-bar conversation with poloff, the French rebuffed arguments that deployment of a UN peacekeeping force would help stabilize the political and security situation in Somalia in a way that allows for more sustainable solutions to piracy. They said that "not enough political process had been made" on the ground in Somalia and that there "are serious operational concerns" with force generation. End comment.

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